

Schools

The literature surrounding Isle Brevelle and Cane River is rather misleading in respect to formal education. Creole children were educated to the best of their families' abilities, and formal education was expected.

The Daughters of the Cross established a school for Isle Brevelle over a century ago tradition holds they lived at the Badin-Roque House - and while some people disagree about that, it is clear they came and that there was a parochial school established at St. Augustine. Children went to that school through the eighth grade. Still, it was not a public school but a Catholic, parochial, school, and it was maintained by Creoles for Creoles.

Some families had sent their children to visit relatives in France, but they returned to Cane River. Nevertheless, such a continental tour showed them part of the world that many nineteenth-century Americans only heard about. Moreover, it reinforced cultural connections with French culture. Still, the eighth grade at St. Augustine was all the education available to the Creole children in the community.

When possible, children were sent to boarding schools, nearly always Catholic and most often in New Orleans. If schools did not board children, arrangements would be made for children to stay with relatives or approved families in the city. Again, French and Creole cultures were reinforced by that cultural environment.

As early as the 1830s and '40s, Creoles were literate;

some even trained as accountants and by the 1900s had turned their attention to educating their children. At least one or two schools developed on Isle Brevelle. One came later, to be known most often as the Chevalier School, so-called after its first teacher, Mann Chevalier, who came to the island from south Louisiana. He is remembered as having taught school in a dress shirt and tie, going home and carefully putting it away so he could farm his land! Matthew Jones opened another school, Jones Agricultural School at Cypress Lane on Isle Brevelle.

In the 1933, a Creole, educated at St. Joseph's School and in New Orleans, "Mrs. Myra Friedman, approached the Natchitoches Parish school superintendent and asked for a school for local children. He told her if she could subscribe such a school and find a place, he would support it. She began teaching at St. Matthew's Baptist Church, a black Protestant church used for a one-room school. She recalls having to take her one hundred students to sit out under the trees during funerals and, eventually, raising money along the Cane River, and on Little River as well, to build a school. St. Matthew's developed into a segregated, grades 1-12, school and operated until it was closed August 8, 1989. Some Creoles attended that school also, but it did not replace the parochial school.

St. Joseph's School at St. Augustine Church was closed in 1967, and the children on Isle Brevelle began attending public schools. Tommy Roque, a member of their last 8th grade class, recalls its demise. Gradually, the classes were phased out and only two nuns, non-teaching nuns, remain at Isle Brevelle. The

two nuns in residence at St. Augustine today are the last representatives of the orders who lived and worked with the Isle Brevelle children. Today buses carry the children to Cloutierville, and others attend St. Mary's School, a parochial school in Natchitoches.¹

1. We Know Who We Are: . . . by H. F. Gregory and J. Moran
pp. 64-66



